YOUVE GOTTA SMILE

DATA Pete Horobin DATA
37 Union Street Dundee

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OPEN LETTER

TO BRITISH CORRESPONDENCE & MAIL ARTISTS

during a visit to robin crozier he expressed some concern about the future of his archived correspondence & mailart. a concern which i shared and one which i am sure we all share. for apart from the tate library there is no official private or state supported organised body equipped to hand le or capable of protecting the outpourings of our generation. the tate despite its healthy collection of modern art does not have a policy to collecting mailart & correspondence art. even if we all bequeathed our collections it is doubtfull that the tate would put enough resources into preserving & publishing the documents. i came away from sunderland chewing over this problem as an accompaniment to my vegetarian diet.

after some days it struck me that between us we could organise our own brit ish archive for correspondence & mailart.

this would have obvious advantages over any other form of permanent preser vation. as a seperate independent museum it would be able to concentrate its resources upon archiving & publishing as well as cataloguing all the material of how the network functions.

clearly the first thing to do is to be on the lookout for a suitable build ing of a reasonable price. once this has been found collectively we must raise the finances to make this dream come true. i will attempt to co-ordinate correspondence on this subject & enclose a list of all persons who have received this initial bulletin.

i look forward to receiving your views & comments.

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178///sunday 21 June'87/// Dear PETE; Thanks for your map-Scotty-letter. I enjoyed reading the old place names. I don't think your idea of a MAIL ART MAUSOLEUM is very practical. The Tate is building two? extensions in the North...(I think) because of the accumulation of art... and a MAUSOLEUM would have constant overheads, and be almost bound to become 'exclusive'...so. in a sense it would be rather a caricature of just those values mail art managed to side-step. I enclose a large slice of TREASURE OF THE SIERRA MADRE as my 'artistic' reply. (THE FOUND FILM SOUND TRACK AS ART AND PHILOSOPHY). The piece on the "B" side I composed recently on a cheapo synthesizer, from an old Chet Baker theme.
My attitude to mail art is the old Taoist one of EASY COME/EASY GO. Anything else begins to resemble KULTUR. The monetarists and the commercialists seem to have won the day, or century?, in our society, so that KULTUR appears to be an argument on TV among well paid solicitors' clerks; not one Labour representative appeared on TV wearing overalls, I noticed, during the Party Debates. So? When the Poll Tax hits England, the nature of the embezzlement may become evident to the population. One of the people on your list sent me a Fascist Manifesto recently. It is not in MY collection at the present time. I seem to recall that Adolf was trying to wipe me out. (1959) So were a good many of my acquaintances, at the time.

ERIC FINLAY

No archive or museum need be a mausoleum. I think your criticism of a possible open collection sadly reflects your own jaundiced view of art & perhaps life in general. I find it interesting to reflect e.f. that it was you who in 1982 was only too keen to mount an exhibition of mail art in a church deep in the heart of rural england much against my own philosophies on mailart at the time. Lon spiegelman as i remember agreed with me then that the last thing the activity of mailing needed was an incar ceration in a fucking church. I doubt if many people even saw it let alone were allowed the pleasure of participat ing in its process. I also remember with a wee chuckle that you zealously took the catalogue to the tate library for storage before few could see it. I imagine even fewer will see it now. So before you elect to use the word mausoleum please reflect. & if you are feeling that old then it is best you take these emotions to the grave with you for inter nment but please remember to leave your kept collection neatly stacked beside your headstone for instant retreival so that it may be enjoyed by future generations.

dear pete,

thanks for the circular ab the pass along book that mark brought round the other day (to my 40th birthday party). will try and find some time to add something worthy before it gets sent on its way to ben etc. some of these people on your open letter list are unknown to me and some ive not had very'satisfactory' correspondunce exchanges with and so the idea of a central independent archive seems rather moot to me at this point. generally my feeling is that any mail art etc. worth saving is better off with individuals- has more of a chance of surviving flood fire but alas not the apocolypse! small is still beutiful in my book and although i am interested to hear about any respeonses you get about this matter i am rather reluctant to share in your enthusiasm for this project. indeed i find it hard enoughto find time to answer the daily intake of mail- any further complications only serve to dissi pate ones limited correspondance activity even more.

i wont go on about how my time seems to slip away. perhaps i am realising now that i have reached this particular portentous point in my life! i seem to have sent the chair cards to somebody else? did i send you one? hope they turn up eventually- if not please send a couple more.

hope to hear from you soon.

best wishes,

Michael & Hazel.

I feel that here sureptitiously between the lines lies a cautious almost evasive answer that betrays your true feel ings on the subject. You are not going to be drawn until you are sure that you may be on a winning side. Very canny sir. You're not scots by any chance are you? I dont think however Al waste that you are looking into your crystal ball with any real intelligence for although small is beau tiful & as you suggest little pockets scattered willy nilly about the place lead to a certain measure of security it can not offer a positive working solution for sharing our collective experience with others. Unless of course one created lots of small independent archives : a highly im practicable solution in every aspect. One home of corres pondence art & mailart would show in an entertaining way i am sure the novel approach we have adopted to the problem of communicating as artists with each other & our peers. Outsiders to the network would be able to see how our web has operated & spread & created a whole new development in art & the process of understanding fellow human beings. I believe that you sympathise with my desire because dis played in your output is an optimism & humour that exhibits a compulsion to share.

Dear Pete

Thanks for the letter which arrived second post this morning. Now the open letter to British Correspondence and Mail Artists is very interesting. One of~~x~~ its problem is I don't think any of them have any money to buy a building, and once a building is purchased it has to be maintained and administered. It would seem more logical to me if an existing institution took on the 'archive'. It might be good if it was somewhere out of London, preferably either Scotland or Eire, to spread things about a bit. Outside of letters there must be a lot of duplicate material, it wouldn't really make sense to have millions of duplicates, so it might be good if all the material was got together and then it was put somewhere. Also it is very important to ensure that it is properly catalogued and not just left to rot somewhere. Unless it is properly catalogued there can be no ~~x~~ real public access, and what's the point of doing it if people can't see it? Would somewhere like Dund museum and art gallery take it on? Or are they too conservaitve/not interested?

So duplicates can be traded off to someone else etc.

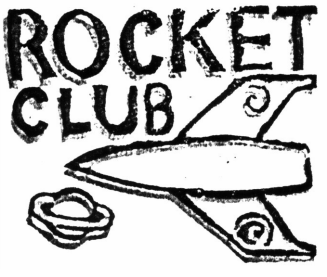
STEWART HOME

Thankyou for your nice levelheaded, quietly intelligent, response. I would not have expected anything less from such a lucid mind. It is encouraging to know that you stand be side me on this issue & share my vision by actively contrib uting regularly large packages of your own correspondence to the DATA ATTIC. But stewart i wonder if you would actually be prepared to work & contribute resources to the setting up of a singular collection. I share your notion of a decentral ised archive & agree that ireland would be a fine location. The final site must be somewhere where property prices are low. With an equally practical mind i tend to think that scot land is best because the bulk of the work is already on the mainland & we would have to minimalise the transport costs. No existing parochial museum has the funds or manpower to take on such a huge task. An independently established trust would however be able to engineer grants & necessary manpower through private & state sponsorship, yop schemes & the like.

Pete, yes I got your package eventually and gave it to mike leigh athis birthday party yesterday. As regards your open letter I am at this time, only able to give you, what I'm sure you will regard as an insubstantial answer, I have seen the problem of archives and made effotts not to end up in this situation m'self, Example at 34 cotesbach, all the mail I recieve is pasted directly onto the walls, I have started in my bedroom, but it is filling up surprisingly quickly, so maybe I will move onto the hall next.....but as you know I'm just a young upstart and in a few years I will settle down and start worrying about my 'archive' , and give your open letter some more serious thought,.....The only real problem I can see is the event of death, in which case we should ensure that nobodys archive is slung out.....
meanwhile heres a supply of 'sell your archive'postcards...

Mark Bowen

I like your witty postcard but wonder who i am supposed to "sell" my archive to. Of course thats the joke. The irony of the situation or the stupidity of the notion that some one may want to buy it. But then i feel that archives are not for individuals to sell for they are freely given coll ections of material. It is nice to think that upon death the responsive "we" will leap to the oars & rescue the personal archive from its fate. Sadly however i dont think there is such a "we" in this country because if we cannot agree on the validity of archives in the first place then i dont imagine that we will have the gumption to form a rescue party. Then of course we have the problem of who takes on the responsibil ity of caretaker for such a person then is pushed into the position of taking the first step towards looking after a coll ective archive. I would love to volunteer my services because i own a large space but i dont see the DATA ATTIC as being the right situation for lots of reasons : mostly of security.



Tony Lowes
Chief Artichoke
King

AGAINST ARCHIVES

"during a visit to robin crozier he expressed some concern about the future of his archived correspondence & mailart. a concern which i shared and one which i am sure we all share..." Pete Horobin, OPEN LETTER, 16/6/87

Sabateurs! Where are you?! Even the most militant of the mail underground keep copies of their own "outpourings", let alone the countless cardboard boxes of product that come through the door. Jack Saunders even offers himself as a living archive.

Pete Horobin's proposal for "our own british archive for correspondence & mailart" is an attempt to ennoble what is the worst aspect of mailart - the egoism, the desire for immortality. Aping the Tate! Making the future more important than the present. Hooked on ART! If the establishment won't help us, we'll make our own establishment. Oh, snail sucks!

Pete and Robin want to be immortal. They believe that they deserve to be immortal. And they want a building for their "outpourings"! Are their outpourings more important than homeless people? I guess they must be - to them and their circle. Well, count me out, buddies, count me out.

It's the whole myth of achievement, the whole sappy, raw, super-star shuffle. I think now that in the attempt to establish a collective identity - the Cantain to Smile routeen - the 15 minute super-star - the end result was not to debunk super-star identity - but to let us all have a piece of the action. Interesting, no?

You too can be immortal, the argument goes. You can do it playing the art game. It's so much more worth while - so much better than the society that produced it! Your name can be on the time capsule we bury!

Robin and Pete and their archives are not the super brain of the future: by withdrawing their mail from movement they actually withdraw from the shaping and forming of all our braincells.

Just as archives ape the establishment ("even if we all bequeathed our collections it is doubtful the Tate would put enough resources into preserving and publishing the documents"), they are part of the one-way media consumer spectacle that is foisted on us every day - and that the mail arose to escape.

A man who consults an archive isn't participating. He's a couch potatoe. And if you don't participate, you don't grow. Nothing is renewed. The more you take the bucket to the spring, the clearer the water flows.

Meaning is when exchange happens. The time that it happens. The concentration - obsession - that is in its creation and reception. This can't be archived or recreated.

The act of responding is what differentiates the mail from the gallery. Go to a gallery for dead art. There's pleanty of that about. And there already exists a codefied cataloguing system and a pretty good archiving one is the current British Library system. Use that. Then, if you want to "publish" - well, isn't that what every mailartist is doing, in editions of one size or another?

Send the boxes of product on. Keep them moving. Aim for the unexpected. Go for the hit in the dark. No grasping. No possessing. No dreaming of immortality.

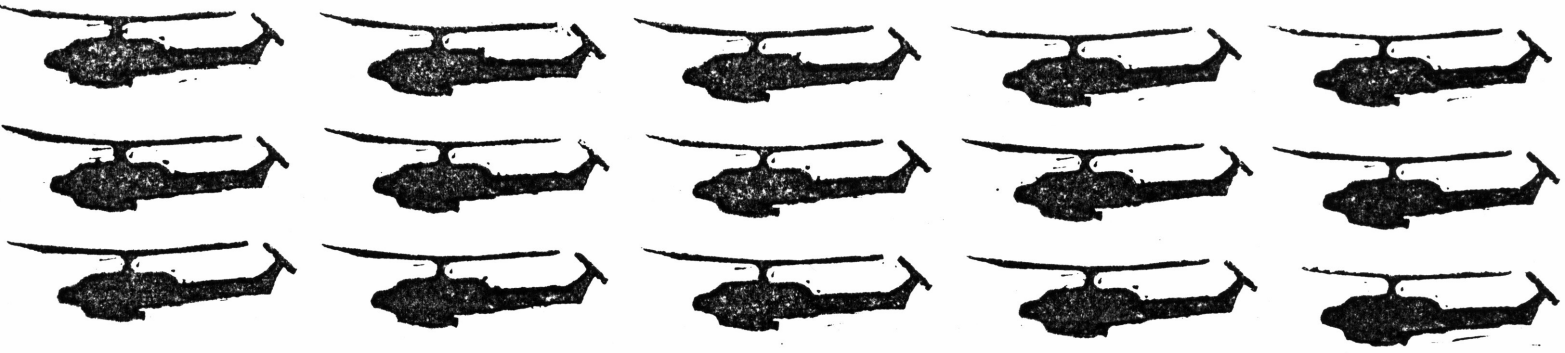
No, I don't have any concern about Robin Crozier's archive, Pete. What you two are up to is the kiss of death for mailart. Hope you at least enjoy the embrace. These are my "views and comments" on Pete Horobin's OBEN LETTER TO ALL BRITISH CORRESPONDENTS AND MAIL ARTISTS. Of which I am neither. Heh.

Your hilarious response fairly made my day. I laughed out loud at your allegations & loved your inditement so much that i blew it up on a xerox machine X4 & have wallpapered one of the rooms in the DATA ATTIC with it. Really tony its priceless & clearly the best thing you have ever sent me. Thankyou.

Pete — I think your archive idea is lonord
— it misses the point and even
emphasises the singularism that mail transcends.
Let the mail be forgotten. What you have here
is it worth remembering. Once and for all,
and DEFINITELY, I am not an artist, and
only artists need archives. Words and pictures
aren't special. It's the currency of man,
and everyone can deal. Beethoven thought he was
special. Maybe he was just privileged.

DJ at FOMT

Strange as it may seem i have always had a kindred spirit for your philosophy on life. A celtic bond perhaps. I too believe that it is the " currency of man " that is import ant; a feeling that led me away from exhibiting in galleries to exploring a more direct form of communication via corres pondence. Unfortunately for all of us we are snared by our own materialism or the need to produce a tangible object in a medium to fulfill the function of reaching another person. So we make a xerox, or an audio cassette, or we write a letter & by so doing we create an object & unless we destroy these objects upon receipt they collect & if they collect then they manifest our weaknesses & strengths & if they collect & survive time then they will be rediscovered & appraised. When they are appraised purely in the objective sense then the original intent will be lost. The personalities behind the objects will dis olve. Art aesthetics will obscure the commonwealth of man. However in our collective case i am sure of one thing that the universe we have created will perpetuate in strength albeit mystified & diluted. I dont agree DJ that only artists need archives : i put it to you that human beings need archives so that they can constantly reassess their own worth & pro gress. The artistic spirit in all of us rebels against the archival process but we are forced to accept our human comp ulsion to preserve. Our outpourings are our children : our seeds for the future & we take a maternal instinct towards them. Why else do you keep all the tapes & books & things that you receive? You are fortunate for you have a family who will take care of your property once you die. They will do this instinctively because they will want to preserve their mem ory of you. Ask them one night when the family is collected in the rangeroom " What will you do with all daddy's stuff when you die? "



I think the best way to archive the info/DATA/work produced by British ~~Rail~~ Mail art is to publish. It makes it all documented/miniaturised(?) and portable/sellable.

The future lies in Sponsorship.

Ben

As far as i can see it ben archiving & publishing are 2 completely different kettles of fish. I have always imag ined that one archives what is published. To publish what has already been published can obviously be beneficial if one wishes to increase circulation but it does not solve the problem of archiving. You are one of these young materialist artists born of thatchers great britain for you clearly see that artists should compete within the open market place by selling their product & you will go to any length to ensure that your product will do just that. I wish you well & hope that you do indeed find a public who want to buy what you make. But again you confuse the issues. An archive is not a commodity for sale it is a small piece of human endeavour to be shared with others. Whether an archive should publish is a different quest ion altogether. Should an archive exist at all seems to be difficult enough to answer. & if it should then who should take on the burden of responsibility : the artists themselves or an already existing institution?

Dear Pete Horobin,

Thanks for your letter re: Mail Art Archive British section. It so happens that today I received Tony Lower contribution to the debate so I thought I may as well get this started to you.

In some ways I agree with Tony that archiving mail seems to go against one of the major aspects of mail art as I perceive it: an alternative to mainstream art. I'm not a particular crusader here, mind. The trouble is with formalising everything into a structure will impose order on the anarchy which I don't think is really a good thing (for mail art)

I appreciate your desire not to let all the work disappear forever into the dreaded cardboard box.

In practical terms I think that the kind of money you will need to do a decent job is quite substantial. I would prefer to use any spare cash I have towards new projects rather than preserving the old ones. If Paul Getty gave us a blank cheque, fine, but it is hard enough to squeeze cash out of anyone even for worthwhile "mainstream" art ~~projects~~ schemes (in this country)

All of these make me less than enthusiastic about the project not so much on philosophical grounds but much more on the practical side especially the time and finance side. I have precious little of either know what I mean?

Paul Jackson / John Dalpra.

ART NAPHRO

Taking into consideration the fact that we never before co rresponded i must thank you for an inteligent balanced reply written in a forthright & friendly manner. There are one or 2 topics you have raised that i would like to comment on. Arch iving does not go against the main thrust of mailing. As i see it archiving is an integral part of the process. Not only are we sending out our own creations but we are exchanging contin ually for those of others & unless we pass on these exchanges or destroy them we entertain the first principles of archiving. You are correct to assume that mailart is an alternative to mainstream gallery art but its alternativism is in no way com promised or endangered by the process of archiving. In fact i would say that archiving alternative methods is a very import ant aspect of alternativism for how else are those in punter land to know that something alternative to mainstream ideology ever happened. Well of course you use the word anarchy & the whole notion of a free pool of knowledge & experience in which we can all bathe is part of the anarchistic utopia but surely there would be no pool without a deliberate attempt to create a proper dam.

Hi Data Pete Data!
museum for mail-art wld be good
Peter Kustermann - P.O. Box 2644
D-495 Minden / W.-Germany
said to me i shld do a welsh
museum or at least start
a archive of my own /
i do mail-art as one of my main
things (* has become a channel
over the years for some of my
most exciting projects) so any
museum wld help i think?
Ok more anon
as it happens
Cosmiclove & saxophones forever
Barry Edgar Pilcher

* i did start an archive but a very small one the best of!

We are in an interesting predicament here because we have a situation where a group of people have created a body of work that they appear to be indifferent towards & which ironically is kept under mothballs by them. One wonders why they are indif ferent to it. Is it because each & every one of them recognises within it a shallowness & superficiality which is so insubstan tial as to be not worth preserving? If this is indeed the case then is it not peculiar that so many people should spend so much time & energy to producing & to perpetuate the production of what they themselves regard as junk? On the other hand could it be that those who have made this body of work complaisantly expect another authority to step in & declare a great interest in it by purchasing it & cataloguing it all for posterity? Further to this will the group of creators take umbridge if no-one assumes such a dedicated interest to such an extent that they will destroytheir collections of accumulated work in a display of bitter defiance?

Also got your letter about the ARCHIV. Now its my turn to EXpress feelings that the work is not significant enough to justify a payment of rental and curator and that I haven't sent work to all these people and that I haven't got an archive because POST ART projects have been dealing with the archive problem by putting it out in public. I have kept a scrapbook of stuff and there is a paper wallet with your correspodence in it. Parsons nearly always sends me rubbish and cuts up what I send him into little bits. But surely just an association of the people who do keep archives And I do appreciate the work you have put in at the DATA ATTIC to archive peoples work in a beautiful way with those boxes and the presentation of the work as part of the boxed environment of the flat is an important statement in itself and the W.P. book on DATA ATTIC that I'd like to see would have a fair bit on just this style of archiving and presentation. (Somewhere here there is a vision of a whole new way of handling working class history as a mass of viewpoints so each 'family' has a sense of itself from its own 'DATA ATTIC' ARCHIVES and each 'community' has its own historians who 'mine' these archives and accumulate wisdom from our individual frantic efforts.)

* So anyway an association of the well kept archives could put out a joint index which could be (properly bound + beautiful bound) be distributed to all the main art libraries and historians. So it would be clear where the material could be found. Perhaps a grant could be obtained for the creation of this index. Perhaps minor or unkempt archives could be included in well ordered ones — again grant aided. Perhaps, again, a college library would buy up the archives and take on the task of being the BRITISH MAIL ART ARCHIV. but what a task? Maybe even meg at the Tate Library might negotiate some deal. (I have, and intend to pass on all catalogue type material to her as a donation)

So sorry not more conclusive but still hopefully a positive response

x Stefan x

↑ in thinking of or attempt to archive - with data

STEFAN SZCZELKUN

I didnt really want to put you on the spot here stefan by compromising you into making any value judgements about your own projects in the mail. But you as much as anyone i know who are making alternative statements & using postal practises in such a way as to be a part of the correspondence art & mailart movement in britain today. In fact through your en ergies i have discovered new correspondents on my scottish doorstep. It is for this very reason that i included you in the open letter & value the comments & constructive critic isms you may contribute. The archival process was always for me an integral part of my DATA project & as such i have comm itted myself to doing as good as job of it as possible within my very limiting financial constraints. However i always put live projects before archival duties because i beleive in the action of the present rather than the preservation of the past but then for historical reasons i devote some time & never enough resources to archiving my own DATA & that of others are enthusiastic enough to send me. Although we are living during times when the pressures to give up alternative ideals are great & sympathies run against us i feel that somewhere in the future the tide will turn in our favour & a good arch ive of what was produced as alternative during the 80s will take on a significant importance.

Well i wonder who among us - or who in GB - would take res ponsibility for producing a " properly + beautifully bound " joint index. Conceptually its a fine idea but fraught with insurmountable difficulties. I cannot but think again that any college or institution committing themselves over & above their ordinary working duties would have to be rather wealthy to take on a british archive for correspondence art & mailart.

THE ARCHIVE I hadn't thought to comment on the proposal because I was wanting to see if any one else was going to comment. I think that generally those who are involved in doing things will see themselves as being too busy to conserve what accrues from their energies and want to leave that responsibility to practitioners of other kinds. Even now I notice that Fluxus archives that used to be in the hands of private individuals are going to State or National Institutions and Museums. Maybe this is where correspondence archives should go is this is where the expertise in conservation lies. The daily publication and collection of material will continue to expand as long as people exist who wish to operate this way so that is taken care of as long as minds connect. Again I noticed that a Fluxus archivist was publishing or reprinting slowly all his material which seemed a little odd to me. Rather like Marcel Duchamp educating his bicycle wheel on a stool - - - ? all the best. Robin

ROBIN CROZIER

As in many ways this whole episode began with you i feel that you should get the final word. In your quiet decisive way i think you are confident that your own large collection of exchanged works & collective projects will be taken on by a private or state administered body. Even if in the black est of future prospects your entire volume of work was destroy ed after your death you could rest contentedly in the satis faction that you perhaps as much as anyone in this world have stimulated correspondence art & mailart activity among a great many people. That in itself is of monumental importance. I dont think at this stage that we are well enough organised as a group in britain to discuss practicably the institution of a national archive for correspondence art & mailart. However i would hope that those who are keeping collections look after them as best they can & spend as much time & resource upon archiving so that it becomes an integral part of the art pro cess & to those who are intent upon casting it back into the river i ask that they do so in the most artistic & creative way imaginable to them.

Through the production of this series of replies my own interest in the case rests. The cynicism & bitterness within the network is obvious; the contradictions within the polemic are blatant & the lack of organisational coherance within an art group or movement is once again manifested. I feel confid ent however that this arguement will continue & sadly as usual in the british way - the gate will be firmly closed after the gleeful cuddy has bucked over the horizon.

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